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SERVICES

AT

THE DEDICATION

OF THE

NEW CHANNING CHURCH

NEWTON, MASS.

ON TUESDAY, MAY 23, 1882

TOGETHER WITH

SERMONS PREACHED AT THE TIME OF LEAVING THE OLD
AND ENTERING THE NEW

BY THE PASTOR

REV. FRANCIS B. HORN BROOKE

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BOSTON

FRANKLIN PRESS: RAND, AVERY, AND COMPANY

1882



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DEDICATION.

AT three o'clock on the afternoon of May 23 the services of dedication were opened by the singing of the familiar words, "From all that dwell below the skies," by the choir and congregation. The Rev. G. HERBERT HOSMER of Salem offered the prayer of invocation.

INVOCATION.

Not without thee, our Father, are we met together; and we would at all times acknowledge thy presence and invoke thy blessing. We come with glad hearts to dedicate this new temple, which our hands have raised to thy worship and service, conscious, unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it.

We would remember before thee all who have faithfully served in their day and generation in this church; and in the same spirit their descendants, desiring to strengthen and broaden the walls of their Zion, now raise this new temple. We feel surrounded by a cloud of witnesses; for we believe but a thin veil separates us from the saints in light,—ay, from those who have labored and prayed to strengthen the things which remain.

And now, our Father, we pray that peace may be within these walls, and that peace may come to young and old who enter here; and in the spirit of Jesus, who taught us to call thee Father, and to worship thee, who art a Spirit, in spirit and in truth, we would render to thee thanksgiving and praise forever. Amen.

THE choir then rendered the anthem, "Rejoice in the Lord," after which Rev. RUFUS P. STEBBINS, D.D., of Newton Centre, read appropriate selections of Scripture.

SCRIPTURE READING.

Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, who put it into the hearts of his people to build a house to the God of heaven.

And the people had a mind to work.

And they gave money unto the masons and to the carpenters to prepare timber and stones to build the house.

And the work went fast on, and prospered in their hands; and the artificers and builders did the work faithfully.

Thus all the work, made for the house of the Lord, was finished.

How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! Strength and beauty are in thy sanctuary! holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, forever!

Blessed are they that dwell in thy house. They are continually praising thee.

My soul longeth; yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord. Oh, come, let us worship before the Lord our Maker!

Who shall ascend into the house of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?

He that hath clean hands and a pure heart. They go on from strength to strength. Every one of them appeareth before God. No good thing doth he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

But will God indeed dwell in the earth? Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain him; how much less this house which was builded with hands!

Have faith in God! I will meet thee and commune with thee from the mercy-seat, saith the Lord. Lift up your heads,

O ye gates! and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors! and the King of glory shall come in. And the glory of the Lord filled the house.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find.

There are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit; and there are differences of administration, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God who worketh all in all. Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife, and some also of good will. What, then? Notwithstanding, every way is *Christ* preached; and therein do I rejoice, and will rejoice. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God? As God hath said, I will dwell *in them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, unto God, which is your reasonable service. That ye may be built, as living stones, polished after the similitude of a palace, upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, may grow into a *habitation of God*; that they all may be one as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee; that they may be one even as we are one, keeping the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace, in honor preferring one another.

Let us not sleep as do others. Having our loins girt about with truth and our lamps trimmed and burning, let us press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, that we may be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect.

I have many things to say unto you; but ye cannot hear

them now. The time is short. Be ye faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life. For what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Peace be within these walls! For my brethren and companions' sake, I will now say, Peace be within thee! Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good. They shall prosper that love thee.

A HYMN, written for the dedication of the old church, by Mr. SAMUEL JENNISON, jun., and sung Feb. 25, 1856, was read by the Rev. J. P. SHEAFE, jun., of South Natick, and sung by the whole congregation : —

ORIGINAL HYMN.

(Used at the Dedication of the Old Church, Feb. 28, 1856.)

When first the Twelve in grief and gloom,
 Within thy gates, Jerusalem,
 Were gathered in that upper room,
 Jesus was in the midst of them.

Since then what myriad lofty fanes
 By Christian hands upreared have been !
 For still the loving word remains,
 Though that dear Presence is not seen.

With prayer, with song, with organ tone,
 With utterance of that loving word,
 In one more temple made thy own,
 Praise waiteth for thee now, O Lord !

One temple more : we name it thine ;
 Yet how shall it accepted be,
 Unless our spirits we resign,
 And consecrate our lives to thee ?

Here may the gospel Jesus taught
 Fall like sweet music on each ear,
 And works of heavenly grace be wrought
 In every heart that worships here.

Then shall thy children, gathered round
 Thine altar with the gifts thou bidst,
 Feel that they stand on hallowed ground,
 And know thou dwellest in their midst.

THE dedicatory sermon was then preached by the Rev. FRANCIS G. PEABODY of Cambridge.

SERMON.

“Even so would He have removed thee out of a strait into a broad place.”

JOB xxxvi. 16.

WE meet to-day with mutual congratulations. We rejoice together that this church and congregation, so sacredly ministered to and loyally supported for thirty years, have outgrown one home and have grown into another. We are glad that you have been “removed out of a strait into a broad place.” Yet it is not alone for the enlargement of your convenience, or the increase of your numbers, or the indication of your harmony, that we rejoice. When such a transition as this takes place in the life of a church, it means much more than the satisfaction of your private ends. It is prophetic of a transition in your purposes and ideals. This outward enlargement of your circumstances is the symbol of an enlarged conception of your mission and opportunities. If God has removed you out of a strait into a broad place for your worship, it is — you must believe — because he has given you a larger work to do, and has removed you out of a strait into a broad place in your dealings with the problems and the duties which beset you.

What, then, are these larger problems, these broader privileges to which your outward transition is but a response? They are not the peculiar property of any single congregation or neighborhood. They are waiting for recognition wherever people are joined together in the spirit which joins you here. The fact is, that the whole body of the liberal Christian churches finds itself in our day at that critical epoch when new problems are taking the place of old and familiar ones,

when large possibilities are replacing limited purposes, and the same God who gave them in the past a specific and narrow work to do, now stands ready to remove them out of a strait into a broad place. I call this a critical epoch, because in the life of churches, as in the life of nature, there is no such thing as standing still. There is either growth through the acceptance of new life, or there is downright decay. When, then, it comes to pass that new problems, fresh purposes, a broader mission, open before a church, then its vitality is tested. The backward look, the sigh for the "good old times," the clinging to the problems of the past,—these are the characteristics which separate a church from the living interest of practical people. The quick appreciation of present needs, the profound interpretation of living problems,—these are the signs which justify the continued existence of a church. "There is," says Thomas Arnold, "nothing so revolutionary, because there is nothing so unnatural and so convulsing to society, as the strain to keep things fixed."

What, then, is this great transition in the purposes of liberal Christianity, in which we find ourselves involved, and of which your outward change is a fitting symbol? You know what the early purpose of the Unitarian movement was; you know how honorable and honest a movement it was,—the protest of clear minds against a technical method of salvation, and in behalf of the simplicity that is in Christ. You know how soon it won to itself a great proportion of the most sagacious, poetic, and philanthropic minds of this country. You know what poets, philosophers, historians, theologians, sprung, either by coincidence or by inheritance, from the time and place when this movement began. It was a golden age of literature, of poesy and prophecy, in whose twilight hour we still linger, and whose departing splendor we mourn. It is a spiritual ancestry to justify honorable pride. We can hardly hope to serve the demands of our times as loyally and effectively as these men did the needs of theirs. And yet we must confess that the place into which God removed those early liberal Christians was a strait place. It was, after all, one sort of New England Congregationalism over against

another sort of New England Congregationalism. It was a difference of theological results, but with the same theological assumptions. Trinity against unity, depravity against integrity, eternal decrees against human freedom, church against parish,—these were real differences, worth contending for, and yet very limited, special, sectarian, transitory. Visions, it is true, passed before some minds—like his whose memorial this building is—of union and enlargement beyond these distinctions of opinion; but, none the less, the immediate problems of the time were of this special, local, limited kind. The Lord had set them in a strait place.

And at what point have we now arrived? We have come to a point where these early controversies are sheer matters of history, with no living issue among them. I do not mean that you cannot find some relics of that unhappy contest. You may even now occasionally hear some belated gun go off, directed against Channing, or Parker, or Emerson; but you hear no returning fire. There is no need of defence at any of these points. The interest of warfare, the strategic points, are on another side of the works. The whole climate of the times has changed. I do not suppose a single sermon has been preached for years in a Unitarian pulpit on such a theme as the denial of the Trinity. Nor have I heard this year a single voice prophesy hard things for the sainted souls of Longfellow or Emerson or Bellows. To read of that earlier warfare is like reading the history of the Crusades. It was brave fighting; it tested souls: but it was an issue which can never be fought out again.

What shall we say then? That the mission of the liberal Christian churches is fulfilled? That there are no longer living problems waiting for them to solve, and worthy purposes to which new and fairer churches may be dedicated? I ask you to see, on the contrary, that—in the providence of God—the mission of our churches is as definite as ever, but far larger and more persuasive than it ever was before. A problem of thought addresses our minds, a problem of conduct addresses our judgment, a problem of worship addresses our affections; and these three problems, kindred of each other,

happen to be the central, special, absorbing problems of the thought and life of the time.

Consider, in the first place, the point at which modern thought is now brought to a pause. Here, on the one hand, is a whole flood of new methods, principles, discoveries, a sudden and startling overflow of the limits of earlier inquiry ; and here, on the other hand, are the permanent, precious aspirations and visions of the human race ; and the one question of the time—not for ministers and churches alone, but for all thoughtful minds—is this : “ Will this sudden flood make an end of these aspirations ? will it submerge these visions ? or will it only buoy them up, and bear them on to larger service ? ” The problem of our time—that is to say—is the problem of religion, the reconciliation of faith and knowledge, the translation of the religious life into the language of to-day. No student can bury himself beyond the range of this central subject. No philosopher can shut it out. No theme in our periodical literature is so popular or remunerative as some aspect of the problem of religion. But why is this problem, which concerns all thoughtful minds, in any peculiar sense our problem ? How is it that we find ourselves, through the nature of our position, brought face to face with it in a special way, and with habits of mind prepared to welcome it ? It is, first, because—of Christian bodies—we are most free to address ourselves to this central problem, least hampered or distracted by other interests, side issues, subordinate questions of doctrine, or administration, or ritual. Suppose, for instance, that you were an English clergyman of the Established Church. A multitude of questions would be of essential importance to you concerning your liturgy, your legal attitude, your church administration ; and you would be sadly interrupted in your dealing with deeper problems,—nay, you might even come to think these problems great and deep. But if, by chance or Providence, you should wade through these shallows and into the deep ocean of great thoughts, where would you look for an authority and a support ? Every one knows who is the first authority in England concerning the reconciliation of scientific method with religious convictions.

You would turn to Mr. Martineau; and, from your position, you would say, "These writings are sadly insufficient in their recognition of Church authority, apostolic succession, established ritual; but, when it becomes really deep water and a matter of life or death to faith, then this man knows how to swim with a free arm and a strong stroke." And the reason is obvious: he can give his whole thought to these matters; he has nothing else to do.

This is one reason why the central problem is for us; and a second reason is, that we undertake to see both factors in it. We have not turned our back upon the past; we have not surrendered ourselves to the limits or methods of natural science; we believe in the worth and the witness of the spiritual life. Thus, if over against the churches we are free and unembarrassed, over against the prescriptions of materialism and indifference we stand for the reality and measureless effect of ideal truth. And thus the ministry of reconciliation, the problem of union between the conflicting intellectual forces of our time, the fusion of the open mind and the receptive heart, the reading of one word of God, in history and in nature, in Bible and life, in the world without and the soul within,—this step for which the thought of our time wearily waits,—this is the work, the positive, constructive, conservative work, waiting for a church like this to do.

But is it then—I think you may well say—for this alone that we are to meet and labor here? Is it for the solution of intellectual problems that we have built this house of God, and in the discussion of them that we must satisfy our desire for worship? By no means. It is to no such strait and stifling place that God has removed you, and to no such weary intellectualism that you must condemn your worship. The ministry of reconciliation which I have tried to describe is indeed a mission which demands thoughtfulness in its disciples, and intellectual training in its ministers. Let us be thankful that it does; glad that the present function of our churches demands, as its past has done, learning no less than piety, thought no less than emotion, an educated ministry and an open-minded laity. But in no intellectual problem does

the ministry of reconciliation cease. It has no less assuredly the basis of effective work and of elevating worship.

Look at the practical work which a church has to do. Here, once more, on the one hand, are the new and scientific methods of charity, reform, benevolence, the sense of failure in the earlier, sentimental ways, the questioning whether the whole history of dealing with the poor and vicious is not the history of one colossal mistake ; and here, on the other hand, are the eternal impulses of human love and brotherhood, which will not be stifled, and which must be directed. Here then is, once more, your practical problem, — yours, who stand on the one hand for intelligent methods, and on the other hand for spiritual impulses ; yours, who are unwilling to see generosity a harmful agent, but who are still more unwilling to see the spirit of charity die or fail in human hearts. Here is your practical problem, — to find safe channels for the stream of fervid kindliness, to enlarge the methods of reform and charity about you so that the heart and head may be fellow-workers, and the religious impulse may safely come out into the light of scientific methods and work in the dark no more.

Or turn, most of all, to that other factor of life which a church most directly and imperatively represents, — the spirit of living worship. What is the pressing peril here ? It is, plainly enough, the threatening divorce of worship from reasonableness, the possible separation of piety from intelligence, the awful disaster that must occur when the Church betakes itself in one direction, and the rational, awakened thoughtfulness of the time sets out in another. I need not say to you how present this danger is ; how sacerdotalism and emotionalism on the one hand, and the arid speculations of intellectualism on the other, are threatening the very life of rational and thoughtful piety. I only remind you that here is the final test of this ministry of reconciliation. It is not the philosophical solution of theoretical difference which justifies and strengthens a church ; it is not the wisdom of its practical benevolence ; it is the renewal in the full light of modern methods of the spirit of sincere worship, the union of thoughtfulness and prayerfulness, of the disciplined intellect and the

consecrated life. If it shall come to pass that either of these factors fail in a church, then its highest mission fails. If, on the one hand, a church withdraws from the intellectual interests of the time, it withdraws itself forthwith from any mission to the leaders of the time. If, on the other hand, the choice must be made between a church whose views are rational, but whose worship is barren, and a church whose piety is warm and whose devotion is rich in spite of the inconsistencies of its theology, then there are multitudes, believe me, who will cry in the face of logic and reasonableness, "Better a prayer ill directed than an essay well delivered ; better the scanty nourishment of the herbs of an insufficient theology where the spirit of a living piety is than the stalled ox of a robust rationalism and the strife and weariness of human discussion." Nay, they will go farther, and will even dare to infer that the Church which under any method ministers to the spirit of devotion and quickens living piety must have caught sight of some side of truth hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed only to the prayerful heart. The adjustment of thought, the justification of charity, the perpetuation of worship,—these are the three problems with which the Church of the present must frankly deal. And these three, I repeat, are one,—one problem of spiritual renewal, one task of reconstruction, one ministry of reconciliation, touching alike the mind, the conduct, and the heart.

And now, finally, what must a church expect which accepts a ministry like this? It must expect misinterpretation, hostility, disappointment. It cannot commend itself to those who are anxious to construct a close-walled sect, or to those who are absorbed in controversy, or to those who feel called to go whooping over the world in pursuit of freedom, and who care nothing for the reconciliation of freedom with faith. It must disappoint those who look for large denominational development, or rigid standards of doctrine, or sharp antagonism with other communions. It has but little negative, destructive, or combative work to do. But, on the other hand, it may anticipate within its modest limits the noblest possibilities and the purest usefulness. It will command the sym-

pathy of those who desire that their church shall be the one which puts away all lesser problems, and addresses itself directly to the central issues of serious minds. It will encourage an honorable type of men and women, strenuous for truth, ready for duty, trusting in prayer. Its members will not lightly sign creeds, or rashly undertake a sentimental philanthropy, or make a superstition of their worship. It will be free from narrow partisanship, the equal narrowness of those who will not think, and of those who cannot feel. It will have no controversy to maintain with other churches; for its work is in reality the same work as theirs, only, it believes, less obscurely recognized and more directly undertaken. It will look for its natural growth, not by detaching members from other communions, but by winning back to the consolations of religion some of that great multitude of precious souls who have perceived the divorce of reason from religion, and are waiting for the ministry of reconciliation. It will see, not far away, the vision of a fellowship larger than any denominational name, where all who believe in the spiritual life may throw their weight together on the precise point where the world most needs it; where we may push together with thoughtful believers of every name,—push with all the force of history, philosophy, prayer, and life, against the barrier which holds back ignorance of history, materialism in philosophy, and worldliness in life from breaking in and crushing out the hopes and ideals of mankind. And in this vision, this anticipation, this basis of union, it will take up into itself, we may reverently believe, some genuine part of the gospel ministry of Jesus Christ,—that withdrawal from unessential distinctions, that ingathering of all contrite and devout hearts, that vision of comprehensive unity, that enlargement of thought, of charity, and of worship, which, from the time of Christ till now, has led every life which could receive it “out of a strait into a broad place.”

AFTER the sermon, the following hymn of Pierpont was read by the Rev. ARTHUR M. KNAPP of Watertown, and sung by the congregation :—

HYMN.

Oh, bow thine ear, Eternal One !
On thee our heart adoring calls ;
To thee the followers of thy Son
Have raised and now devote these walls.

Here let thy holy days be kept ;
And be this place to worship given,
Like that bright spot where Jacob slept,
The House of God, the gate of Heaven.

Here may thine honor dwell ; and here
As incense, let thy children's prayer,
From contrite hearts and lips sincere,
Rise on the still and holy air.

Here be thy praise devoutly sung ;
Here let thy truth beam forth to save,
As when of old thy spirit hung,
On wings of light, o'er Jordan's wave.

And when the lips, that with thy name
Are vocal now, to dust shall turn,
On others may devotion's flame
Be kindled here, and purely burn.

THE dedicatory prayer was offered by the Rev. EDWARD J. YOUNG of Waltham.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION.

O thou ever-present Spirit, who art the Giver of every good gift, as we are gathered together before thee, we lift up our hearts in praise and gratitude and adoration ! Thou hast implanted within us instincts and yearnings which seek the infinite and eternal ; and in every age thy children have raised temples and altars for thy worship, that they might express the deepest feelings of their hearts, ask for illumination and guidance, and find forgiveness, strength, comfort, and peace. We

rejoice that we can come to thee as our heavenly Father and Friend, who lovest and hearest us always, who hast manifested thyself in the universe and in our souls, who hast spoken to us through the lips of holy men, and especially through Him who is the way, the truth, and the life. As his disciples we are assembled to dedicate this beautiful temple to thy service; and we look up to thee who art the All-Beautiful, the One altogether lovely, and acknowledge that, as thou hast given us all our blessings, so the best we can bring is not too good, but is only what is due from us to thee. Thou fillest immensity with thy presence. The heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which we have builded! And yet thou dost deign to hear the prayers of thy children, and dost take up thine abode in the humble, sincere, and contrite heart.

We rejoice that this day has come, which sees the fulfilment of long-cherished hopes. We are glad that the period of preparation is at length ended, and that we are permitted to meet here to rejoice with this people in all that their hearts and minds and hands have wrought. We thank thee for all the memories of the past. We recognize thy favor shown to this society in the early days, when they were few, and came together in a small upper room, and were united by one faith, one spirit, one purpose. We bless thee for those who were then with them as leaders and workers, who illustrated their faith by their noble characters and lives, and who are now held in loving remembrance. We rejoice that some of their number yet remain to reap the harvest of the seed which they had planted. And we praise thee that the influence of those who have passed on still survives, and animates this church; and we delight to think that to-day they are in sympathy and fellowship with us, and may be permitted to bend from their holy seats, and join in these services of consecration.

We rejoice, our Father, that the spirit which inspired the founders of this religious society has governed those who have come after them; that the children have followed in the footsteps of the fathers; that they have not been weary in well doing; that all have labored so zealously and given so freely;

and that now they can present this choice offering to thee. We pray that thou wilt accept it as their gift, and as a symbol of what is highest and holiest and most precious to them ; and that thou wilt fill this sanctuary with thy presence, and fill these souls with thy love, and lift up the light of thy countenance upon all thy children.

May those who from time to time shall assemble here worship thee in spirit and in truth ! May the hungry be fed with the bread of life ! May the sorrowful find a peace which the world cannot give ! May the young be led into the fold of the Good Shepherd ! And may all be uplifted and quickened to a higher life ! Send down influences from above that all may be drawn unto thee who art the Fountain of blessedness, may gain strength to bear their burdens, and may have faith which is the evidence of things not seen, so that this place shall be indeed to them the house of God and the gate of heaven. May these memorials of those who have been translated speak to this congregation, bidding each and all to be followers of them even as they were of Christ !

And do thou have this building in thy care and keeping. Preserve it from all harm and peril ; and may it last for many generations, and gather about it more and more sacred associations as the years roll on ! May it stand as a bulwark of Christian truth and righteousness, and from it may influences go forth which shall increase and strengthen all that is good, and help to build up the kingdom of God on the earth !

Look with favor, we beseech thee, upon this pastor and his flock. May thy servant be enriched with all knowledge and all spiritual gifts, that he may speak with new inspiration and new power, and may minister to the wants of this people ! And may these families be blessed in their homes, and in all their interests ! May peace be within these walls, and prosperity within all these palaces ! Thou knowest what we would ask of thee for this church. Grant the petitions which are in our hearts, but which we cannot utter before thee. Help us to dedicate ourselves to thee as the true temples for thy indwelling spirit. And may the Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers ! May he never leave us nor forsake us ! Amen.

THE choir rendered an anthem entitled, "I have surely built thee an house ;" after which the Rev. F. B. HORN BROOKE pronounced the formula of consecration as follows :—

"We dedicate this house to the service of the only true and living God, to the preaching of the gospel of Jesus, to the communication of the spirit of truth, holiness, and love. We dedicate it to the memory of Channing, the prophet of our later time. We dedicate it to the work of conforming the life of man to the will of God ; to the quickening of the spiritual life ; to the declaration of the law of duty ; to the earnest search for whatsoever things are true, honorable, and just ; for whatsoever things are pure, lovely, and of good report. We dedicate it to the cultivation of that spirit which seeks the light, and which finds in all truth the word of God. We dedicate it to the work of redeeming the whole nature of man ; to the spirit of reverent inquiry and wise trust ; to the spirit which looks around and above, to the spirit of aspiration towards God, and helpfulness towards man. And we dedicate it to the work of reconciling man to God and to his brother ; to the work of strengthening human wills to tasks of love and duty, and of freeing man from the bondage of evil and sin. Amen and amen.

The exercises closed with the singing of an anthem, and the benediction by the pastor of the church.

SERMON.

DELIVERED IN THE OLD CHURCH, MAY 21, 1882, BY THE PASTOR,
REV. F. B. HORN BROOKE.

"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

"God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."
JOHN IV. 23, 24.

THESE words express the highest conception of worship,—that conception which makes it independent of time and place, and depending for its value only upon the spiritual condition of the worshipper. Such an idea of worship impressed upon men's hearts has always been, and still is, the most effective means for deliverance from an undue reverence for times and seasons. It will not allow us to think of one place as more favored with the divine presence than another. It causes us to see that all times and all places are alike sacred, and that the sanctifying influences of heaven depend, not upon the place where, or the time when, but upon the spirit in which, we worship. It was this idea of true worship which lifted Christianity above the influences of its national surroundings, and made it a universal religion. It was the influence of this idea which caused the early Christians to regard all times and every place as equally filled with the presence of God. But, great and vital as is this truth, it would be going beyond the intention of the great Teacher to conclude that he ignored all those associations which have such power to bind man's affections more to one place than another. In our interpretation of the teachings of Jesus we must never forget that they must often be regarded rather as protests against dominant tendencies than as complete statements of human duty. Like every wise teacher, he insisted most upon the truths which were most in danger of being neglected. Now, in his time, the tendency of men was in the direction of an exaggeration of the value of places. The Jew thought God was most present in the

Temple at Jerusalem, while the Samaritan imagined that he was to be found most fully revealed on Mount Gerizim. Ritualism was the prevailing characteristic of the day. More importance was attached to the place than to the condition of the worshipper. Religious service was too much an external mechanical affair, in which the form was everything and the spirit nothing.

Against all this the words of Jesus were a protest. But to carry out their meaning as if they contained all that needed to be said of the manner of worship would be to destroy all outward expression of the religious sentiment. It would tend towards a denial of that instinct of the human heart which finds itself more susceptible to the highest influences in certain places and at certain times, because of the associations which cluster around them. These two thoughts—the one asserting the equal sanctity of all places and times, and the other asserting the affection of the heart for one place more than another—may be easily united. It is possible for the soul to acknowledge them both without any sense of conflict between them. We may discard the splendid temple of worship; but the place where we are accustomed to pray becomes identified with the higher spirit we bring to it, and itself assumes an additional sacredness. Indeed, we may say, the one thought cannot exist without the other. Every place loses its sanctity if we fail to bring to it the spirit of reverence and trust; and the places to which we most often go with the highest and holiest desires are invested with the character of our purpose. It is true that one place is as good as another, that God is as near to us there as here; but it is no less true that one place becomes better to us than another, and that thoughts of divine things are more easily awakened where we have been wont to worship than in places to which we are unaccustomed. It is true that in all places we may find a present God; but it is just as much true that we find him most near in the places where we learned to seek him by the side of our mothers, where we were led by our fathers, or where all around serves to remind us of past aspiration and endeavor, of past experiences of joy or sorrow. It cannot be

denied that the colors with which association adorns our surroundings give them an undying charm and an invincible power of attraction.

Thoughts like these present themselves unbidden on an occasion like this, when a place of worship is about to be used for religious purposes for the last time. We well know that one place is as sacred as another, that it is best for us to go; and yet many pleasant and tender memories bind us to the place, and throw over the parting hour, in spite of the glad anticipations of the future, a shade of regret. It would not be well for us, without a word, to break the tie that binds us to the past,—to dismiss, without a thought, the feelings that rise unbidden. Better will it be to strive to realize all the meaning of that past, to cherish that sentiment, by recalling some memories of this place, that so we may unite the past with the future, and make what has been minister to what shall be.

It is only a little over twenty-six years since this church was dedicated. It was originally only two-thirds its present size. But, small as it was, it was large enough for the small number of those who gathered within its walls; and, small as it was, it may be taken for granted that its erection was not unaccompanied with considerable toil, anxiety, and sacrifice. There are few here who were active in that work. But those who were could tell us of some sacrifices made that have not been required to build the new and more spacious house, in which we are soon to enter. We are too much inclined to pass such things by. They are so far in the past, they seem so small when seen in the light of more prosperous days, that we either forget or undervalue the toils and sacrifices of the past. But though these sacrifices were made years ago, and though they seem small, we owe what we have to them. If we have made sacrifices to-day, others made them yesterday. If the pleasanter place of worship cost much, the one we have enjoyed without any trouble to ourselves cost relatively much more. Others have labored, and we have entered into their labors. The fact that sacrifices were made to give us—yes, to give us, for most of us were not here when this building

was erected — what we to-day enjoy, admonishes us that we are in duty bound to do as much in our day, and according to our ability for those who will come after us. We have no right to receive favors without bestowing them. The measure of our duties is in proportion to the greatness of our benefits. These walls, plain and simple as they are, came to most of us as an inheritance from those who toiled and labored to make them ours; and they are a silent admonition to leave to those coming after us, not merely as much, but more than we ourselves have received. To whom does this place seem most dear? Not to us who have not done any thing to make it even what it is. It must have the greatest charm for those who have anxiously watched its growth, who have spared no pains to give it new beauty. To these this church has the same kind of charm and attraction which belong to the child who has needed most of our care. The things for which we do most, we care most. Naturally, necessarily, our hearts go out towards that for which we have labored. That is why some of you see more in these walls than meets the eye. You see them in the beauty which toil and sacrifice have power to give to even the commonest surroundings. To you this place is irradiated with the radiance which comes from the spirit of the Christ and his cross.

A few days since, I read the sermon of Dean Stanley, preached on the eight hundredth anniversary of the dedication of Westminster Abbey. Naturally the preacher noticed the vast changes that had taken place in England since the walls first resounded to the voices of prayer and praise. Compared with the changes in a period of time so vast, the changes which have occurred since the dedication of this church may seem very slight; and yet, even in the twenty-six years that lie behind us, there have been changes and occurrences great as any known to history. When the songs of praise first rose from glad hearts in this place, three millions of men were in chains. The battle for freedom had been fought, and apparently lost. To-day our laws know none but free men. Between that day of dedication and now the greatest struggle known to human history has been begun and ended, and the question

whether we were a nation decided. Some of you, doubtless, remember the anxiety and apprehension that filled your hearts when you met here, and could not forget that your brothers and fathers and sons were braving all the perils of the field of battle. You could not forget how every thing that was most precious seemed trembling in the balance. Since then, quietness and peace, with their attendant blessings of plenty and prosperity, have come again; and we meet with untroubled hearts, and, let us hope, also with thankful ones. But, between the horrible din of the great conflict and the calm of to-day, centuries seem to have intervened, so different are the emotions of those days from these. History is made fast in these days; and a quarter of a century often witnesses as many changes as a quarter of a millennium in former times. Since this church was erected, there have been great changes in the theological world. The Pope has been declared infallible; orthodoxy has been proved fallible. Our first minister, who left Andover after two years of study because he could not accept the doctrines taught there, would perhaps to-day find much less difficulty in subscribing to the positions of Newman Smyth, than the latter would have in subscribing to the creed of that school. The revision of the translation of the New Testament has been completed, and awakened new thought upon the questions of inspiration and revelation. Criticism has placed the Bible before us in a light never thrown upon it before. The study of the Scripture to see what is there, rather than what in our opinion ought to be there, has, in New England, to a great extent taken the place of searching for proof-texts. Old systems of theology have been compelled to find need of restatement, — restatement which sometimes looks very much like rejection of what in former times was imposed as the only word of God. Science, too, in this space of time has opened up new and sometimes startling conceptions of the universe, — conceptions which have thrown a flood of light upon problems that formerly vexed the metaphysician and the theologian. Changes have taken place, perhaps as a consequence of all these other changes, in the more liberal conduct of denominations towards another. They have become aware that

perhaps they may not be so absolutely right after all, and that toleration is the best course. I am sorry to say, however, that the so-called evangelical bodies are yet so certain that liberal Christians are wrong, that they cannot invite them even to thank God with them. But with all the pleasing changes in other directions, and even in this direction outside our own village, we ought not to allow this to trouble us, but make ourselves at least worthy "the fellowship of the saints," and await the future in patience and hope.

It is a short time since this society met to consecrate this place to the worship of God. But what changes there have been among us since you first met together! Of the ministers who took part in the dedication service, only two survive; and one of these sits even now in "the valley and shadow of death." Of the strong ones who greeted them, how few remain! To many of you they are unknown, so long have they gone before. But many of them have not wholly died: their memories linger among us to bless and inspire. I would mention names, were not the roll of our honored dead so long. Your own hearts will recall them. Some who were here on the first day are still with us; but, though time has dealt gently with them, they are only too conscious that the long years are behind and not before them. But what though the hair may have grown thinner and whiter, what though the burdens of life are a little heavier now than then, if, through the intervening years, the same spirit which guided them then guides them still? It is significant that the hymn written for, and sung at, the dedication of this house will be sung at the dedication of the new. It is an emblem of that which amid all change is changeless. It teaches our hearts the lesson, that, though the outward man perish, the inward man may be renewed by the same song of faith in God, and allegiance to the spirit of the Master. What inward changes there have been, what differing phases of moral and spiritual nature, only God and our souls can know. We can only trust that through all changes we "have been transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the spirit."

As you sit here at the end of these years, you are think-

ing of the voices that you have heard from this place. Those who have spoken here seem to be speaking still; and I know some of you are recalling words which have been full of comfort and consolation and inspiration. It would not be fitting for me to recall the words of those who are still spared to labor among us; but I may speak of those who have passed onward and upward.

One went from among you in middle life, — so long ago that few here knew or even remember him. The Rev. Joseph C. Smith was the pastor of this society when it entered this church. When, on Feb. 28, 1856, he preached the dedication sermon, he took for his text the significant words, "But I say unto you that one greater than the temple is here;" and told this people that "the visible sanctuary is subservient to God as the Father of all, to Christ as the Redeemer, and to man as the possessor of an immortal soul; and that by these alone could the temple be sanctified," — a truth which gives to places of worship all the value they have. On the first Sunday he preached from the words, "So built we the wall, and all the wall was joined together into the half thereof, for the people had a mind to work."

His concluding words may well come to you to-day as an admonition: "As you go home, then, to-day, ask of your own souls if their wants and welfare do not need that you should each take such a part in the future work of this place as to build up a wall of consenting wills and life." Some of you who are here to-day may recall how, when wasted and feeble, he spoke to you, for the last time, from the words which, from his position, acquire an exquisite pathos: "Where is thy flock that was given thee, — thy beautiful flock?" The last text of the preacher has found expression in the window to his memory in the new church-building, in the representation of a shepherd caring for his flock. Thus the words spoken here will not pass away with the disappearance of the place where he uttered them, but will be brought back to our minds and hearts, — be enshrined in art.

Dr. Hosmer we all remember, and, remembering, love. The tones of his grand voice still sound in our ears. Who can ever forget the words he spoke when he was about to leave us? Sentences freighted with the meaning which only the long experience of a sainted soul can give still linger in our minds, and refresh our hearts. "All in the church," he said, — "the songs of praise, prayer, preaching, — are to open the way of life, and lead us up to the open vision of God." And again, "The sanctuary is a place chiefly and primarily to come to our higher self, — to get the nearer to our Father, to Jesus, and immortal realities. All need it. If doing right, you need it to do better; and none need it more than those who neglect it." Voices speaking words like these consecrate the place, and make it holy ground. Oh, may they go with us ever, and make our souls fit dwelling-places of the living God!

To many the religious ceremonies in which they have taken part impart a sacred character. To them this altar has become a hallowed place. Here some have plighted their faith to the dearest one for the long journey of life. Here many have acknowledged that their children were God's children, and have dedicated them to his service. Here, at the supper of the Lord, many have caught glimpses of the deep meaning of the life of Jesus. Here some of you have promised, by God's help, to be true to God, and to the spirit of his Son. And others have heard the words of consolation and hope spoken over the dear departed. All these scenes are so intermingled and intertwined with the thought of this church, that they must see in it that which appeals to their hearts, as no other place under heaven can. And I am sure that others among us, although they have engaged in no other rite beyond the ordinary purposes of worship, have memories of times when their hearts have been strangely stirred, and have been so quickened by holier impulses, and so awakened to nobler purposes, that they have gone away with a great gladness of spirit, because they have found something worth living for, — if need be, dying for. Memories like these may well make this place like that where Jacob slept, none other than "the gate of heaven."

Sometimes, when we stand at the end of a period in our lives, we recall all in it that we have achieved that was worthy, and rejoice; all that we have left undone, and mourn. So to-day, for all that we have truly done here, let us be thankful, and take it as prophecy of the still better things which may be done. As for what we have neglected, let us not be discouraged by that, but rather impelled to a devotion which shall more than compensate for the years that we may have lost.

And now, in this solemn hour, let us ask ourselves whether we have been as loyal to our profession as we ought; whether we have accepted or rejected the duties which we ought to have fulfilled; whether we have sought or shirked responsibility; whether in our own way, and with all the power we had, we have tried to make our church a welcome place for the stranger; whether we have come here to worship God "in spirit and in truth," or with listless indifference. If we cannot answer these heart-questionings as we ought, then let us here send up our prayer for help to so answer them in the future that our best selves may not reproach us.

My friends, what is it that makes the churches in which men worship beautiful? It is not the massive wall, the lofty arch; it is not the storied windows, nor noble organ strains, nor voices of sweetest singing. No: all these are only the trappings of the religious sentiment, the mere externals of worship, the mechanism of faith. The true beauty of the church must come from the spirit of the worshippers. It is they, and not bishops, who truly consecrate a church.

The sincere worship of God is the fairest adornment. The earnest endeavor to help man endows with the most sacred charm. The spirit of self-sacrifice alone can transform the house into a temple. Be it ours, then, so to worship, so to work, so to be, that all that has made this place what it is to us may go with us into our new house of worship. And more than this: may we carry there so much more of the spirit of true devotion, of mutual helpfulness, of loyalty to our trust, of the spirit of Christ's cross, that, in the deepest and truest sense, "the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former"!

S E R M O N.

DELIVERED IN THE NEW CHURCH, MAY 28, 1882, BY THE PASTOR,
REV. F. B. HORN BROOKE.

“Behold, I have set before thee an open door.” — REV. iii. 8.

THE circumstances under which we meet to-day are full of gladness and encouragement. The work which your toil and care and sacrifice have made possible is finished, and you rejoice in the fulfilment of the wishes of your hearts. All the outward means needed for carrying on the work which has been given us to do are abundantly supplied. We meet for worship in a place attractive and comfortable, and wisely designed to intensify the spirit of devotion. Our children can come together for instruction in rooms whose comfort and beauty will serve to unite the remembrance of wise teachings with pleasant memories.

Means also for facilitating church-work, benevolent effort, and social intercourse, — agencies so necessary in our modern church-life, — have been fully provided. Every thing most necessary to the promotion of the spiritual, intellectual, benevolent, and social work of a church, has been anticipated with wise forethought, and to-day is ours.

But, if the present is a season of gladness and hopefulness for us, it is no less a season of gladness and hopefulness for the cause for which we are contending. The condition of the religious world never afforded more favorable opportunities for the advancement of liberal Christianity, or a more attractive and worthy task.

To the most superficial observer the chaotic condition of dogmatic theologies is the most evident sign of the times. The movement of modern thought is away from their claims and their positions. The popular mind is filled with a vague sense of their uncertainty, and lack of reality. They no

longer speak with the old authority; or, if they do, their inability to enforce their authority only renders their powerlessness more palpable. Indeed, to many intelligent minds the systems of theology which, in former times, seemed to reveal the whole intention of the divine mind, appear as baseless and futile as the fantastic conceptions of the monks of the Middle Ages, or the wild dreams of Brahmanism. The systems of Calvin, of Arminius, of Turretin, of Edwards, are either not read at all, or, if read, read only as intellectual curiosities, — not as helps to wiser living. The creeds stand not as proofs of what people actually believe, but as reminders of the faith of the fathers. They are still subscribed, but often in a sense which those who framed them would have been most earnest in denouncing. The bases upon which dogmatic systems have rested — infallible church, infallible councils, infallible popes, infallible scriptures — are daily appearing to the thought of men the chimerical assumptions they really are. In such a state of religious opinion is the opportunity for those who, while they believe in religion and in Christianity, find the evidence of the one in the nature of man, and the evidence of the other in the spirit of Jesus, which shines through the fragmentary accounts of the evangelists, and the sainted souls of Christian history. For, while many may and do reject dogmas, they do not reject faith; while they expose error in a church, they do not infer that a “church is an error;” while they have come to regard the systems of Christianity as “cunningly devised fables,” they still can see in the life of Jesus the expression of the noblest moral and spiritual ideal, and the most powerful incentive to the realization of that ideal; while they have ceased to be Calvinists, Arminians, Lutherans, churchmen, they have not ceased to be Christian. Many of the truest and noblest men and women of our time have lost belief in many things; but they have not lost belief in the endeavor to apply the spirit of Jesus to the circumstances of the present, and to interpret that spirit, and make its meaning clearer by the aid of the verified facts of the time. To such, liberal Christianity makes its appeal; and that appeal never had larger access to the hearts of men

than it has to-day. Through the circumstances of our times a voice seems to speak as it spoke to the Church of that earlier day, "Behold, I have set before thee an open door."

But it is not enough to have opportunities: we must know how to use them well. It is no uncommon thing for religious bodies to lose, by their own short-sightedness and neglect, the most favorable opportunities, and sometimes even to allow them to become obstacles to their aims and purposes. So Roman Catholicism thrust from its bosom those who were in alliance with it by the ex-communication of Queen Elizabeth, by making loyalty to the Church treason to the State. So the Church of England lost its hold upon the great masses by opposing, instead of helping, the great spiritual movement under Wesley. So here, in New England, Congregationalism, instead of seeing in the liberal movement of sixty years ago a providential call to the formation of a church comprehensive enough to include all loyal Christian souls, saw in it only a movement to be met with denunciation; and the door then opened has shut forever. These are warnings sufficient to teach the necessity of that wisdom which knows how to "discern the signs of the times."

I shall not, however, now speak of the course which I think ought to be pursued by the liberal Christians of the country. And I shall not do so for two reasons,—first, because the duties which devolve upon us may be taken as devolving upon the whole liberal Christian body; second, because I want you to feel that the responsibilities of which I speak are *your* responsibilities, and the duties *your* duties. And, as I speak, I trust that each one will take what I say to himself, and see what he can do towards advancing the cause to which he professes allegiance.

There are three ways in which any cause may more powerfully appeal to the world,—by the moral and spiritual character of its adherents, by the clear statement of its principles, and by the value of its work. What we are, what we know, what we do, will decide how much or how little influence we shall exert upon the community in which we live. And the influence of what we are is the first and most important factor in

the success of our movement. This world is never attracted or led for any length of time by mean men, or by men of low moral and spiritual attainment. It is led and influenced by character. Every great movement in the religious history of man has gathered its adherents by the moral and spiritual excellence of those who maintained it. Without this, every such movement is powerless. There may be the wisest statement of truth, and the most earnest and zealous activity ; but the wisest utterance and the hardest work will prove useless when they are unaccompanied by the manifestation in the life of high moral purpose and spiritual character. This holds true even of those who represent ideas which are not uncommon and unpopular. Even the religious organization which is in harmony with commonly received opinions, loses its power when it fails to manifest in the conduct of its followers the presence of a higher moral standard and deeper religious spirit.

Character is the motive force, without which there is no forward movement. It is the inspirational power, without which there is no quickening of the world's heart to the sense of better things ; it is the grace of Christ which wins the world. But if a movement in alliance with customary ideas, without this, loses its power, the lack of it in a new movement is absolutely fatal. It must win its way by what its followers are, or not at all. Belief in what a man is, prepares one to believe what he says. Christianity would never have made its way by miracles, or interpretations of prophecies, or philosophic statements. Anybody might seem to work miracles in the judgment of that credulous, although sceptical, time ; interpretations might be denied, and philosophies seem at most only the brilliant guesses of a busy brain ; but the manifestation of a transcendent moral character, of spiritual perception prepared hearts to receive it, and won the day for it in all earnest souls. The same law still holds : the attraction which true and worthy life exerts upon the nature of man is as deeply imbedded in the nature of things as the law of gravitation. When I read Father Newman, and catch the reflection of his pure nature in his limpid prose, I cannot help

feeling more attracted towards Roman Catholicism ; and I have no doubt that Father Taylor always felt kindly disposed towards liberal Christianity, because of the gospel of "sweetness and light" which lit up the face of Emerson. And if we, opposed as we are to many of the traditions which, in the popular mind, are so associated with religion and Christianity that they seem identical with them, are forced to meet the suspicions and prejudices of men and women, we must in our lives show that we can get along without those traditions, and that our religion and our Christianity needs no such supports. When we have done that, our cause will be virtually won. If we cannot do it, we shall fail, and we ought to fail. For it is not merely a clearer conception of the truth, not merely a truer apprehension of the thought of the times, that a real church ought to offer, but lives that have become purer and sweeter, and fuller of strength and grace by means of the clearer conception and the truer view. What we want to do is to recommend the gospel of liberal Christianity by our lives, and not our lives by means of our gospel. Enough are ready, I know, to flock around any new thought ; but the best and choicest souls will be best prepared to receive our new thought by our new life.

But we need not only a higher moral and religious character to commend our gospel : we also need it to see what our gospel really means, and to show to others what it really means.

We are always in danger, because of our denials of this or that conception of Christianity, of concluding that our mission is one of denial, and denial alone. It is thus that doubt often receives an undue emphasis in our thought. From this danger, only the most profound sense of duty and religion can save us. Then, and then only, shall we see that it is our deeper insight, and not our lack of vision, which causes our doubt in many opinions and traditions about the nature of Christianity. It should be made evident that our denials come out of our deeper conviction, and not out of our lack of conviction. No body of people in this world more needs a clearer spiritual perception than that to which we belong.

Others who trust to what is told them by those who have seen, can better do without it than we. But, as for us, who profess to see and interpret spiritual realities for ourselves, what shall we do, whither shall we drift, if we allow ourselves to lose hold of the great spiritual realities which underlie all forms of religious life? If ours is to be a true progress in religious investigation, it must be in the light of intense religious conviction. We must deny, if deny we must, not because we believe so little, but because we believe so much. It is in the interpretation of the facts of the moral and spiritual world, as in the interpretation of the facts of the physical universe. The scientific observer, as he closely examines the movements of the planets, or the strata of the earth, or forms of plants, or the nature of animal life and growth, begins to realize that the phenomena he sees are not fully explained by any previous theory. So he begins to doubt the theories, not because he knows nothing, but because he knows so much more than the theories can fully explain. And, in the interpretation of moral and spiritual phenomena, they who have studied them most deeply, in their own moral and religious experience, are enabled to see that the interpretations of them are not adequate. This is not doubt: it is a reaching out towards a larger faith; it is the deeper knowledge asking for a deeper interpretation. This is the doubt of the great religious natures. Let us see to it that ours is the doubt of deeper spiritual vision, — of vision so large that it is satisfied with no statement, because it sees and feels more than any finite system can contain. And then ours shall be a positive, and, at the same time, a progressive faith, — positive in its assurance of moral and spiritual realities, beyond the positiveness of any written statement, and progressive as the unfolding powers of human thought; but its positiveness will be that of fullest interior conviction, and its progress that of more adequate explanation of the heavenly vision. And, if we can pitch our lives so high that we can be positive and progressive in this way, we shall soon enter in at the "opened door," and take possession of all those who are religious, but who will not receive religion in the forms pre-

scribed and fixed by an arrogant authority, but only in those which properly spring out of, and fitly express, the spirit and life of to-day. I rejoice in all the nobility of character which has been manifested in the liberal Christian body in times past. I take pride in the names which adorn its memorials. My heart is glad when I recall the saintly souls who have testified, not only to the freedom, but to the holiness, which belonged to their faith. The records of our own church contain names of those who have commended it by their lives of integrity, of spirituality, and of saintly zeal. But we must take these as incentives to still better things. It is our duty not to rest in what has been, but to see that the present and future shall surpass the past. It is for us to show by what we are, in places of business or of public trust, in the social circle, and in the routine of the smallest daily duties, that a higher spirit animates and directs us. We *must* show, by our earnestness to attain to a clearer view of, and firmer grasp upon, spiritual realities, that our word is the expression of the truest religious sentiment. By constant prayer, by daily meditation upon divine things, and by the quickening which comes from the union of hearts in a common worship, we should inform our lives with a spirit which will have power to awaken the spirit of devotion in others, and prompt those who come among us to praise and prayer, and to aspiration after what is highest and holiest and best. Woe be to us if the weary heart is not rested by communion with us, if the listless soul is not roused to effort, if no prophetic fire communicates itself from heart to heart in our common worship! No other gain can make up for this. The social gathering may be pleasant, the amusements may delight, and the music stir the languid pulse; but that is not the mission of the Church. I would rather those who came for these alone remained away. The great movements that sway the future are directed, not by the lovers of pleasure, but by the lovers of God. O my friends! let us so live and so strive, that we ourselves may know that the reproach of coldness and indifference is not true; ay, so that the great world, seeking for warmth as well as light, shall seek us as the flowers lift themselves up to seek the sun.

I have spoken so long of this first way in which we must appeal to the hearts of men to-day, that I can say but little of the two other ways ; viz., by our knowledge of what we stand for, and by the value of the work we do. But the appeal by means of what we are seemed so important, that I could not refrain from giving it, if possible, an undue emphasis. And yet, important as is what we are to the success of our work, it would be untrue to consider it as every thing. It gives us, indeed, a claim to be heard, and kindly listened to. It prevents us from falling into the worst consequences of our peculiar position by keeping us from drifting into the open sea of mere negation ; but, while it does this, it would not alone give us an excuse for being. Other churches may be, and are, good. Other churches present examples of integrity and heavenly-mindedness, and so have great power of attraction. We need not meet apart from the great body of Christian worshippers, if that is all we seek ; for everywhere we shall find earnest, pure, and holy men and women.

To justify our separate positions, we ought to have as clear a conception as possible of what we stand for. There is no use in disguising the fact that we, as liberal Christians, stand for something more than a mere charitable sentiment. Of course it is true that God is our Father ; but nobody denies it. Of course it is true that life is more than creed ; but Wesley affirms it as strongly as Channing. The representation of liberal Christianity in this way has worked it incalculable harm. It has made many who have been reared under its teachings careless about all truth as truth ; it has created a religion of vague sentiment, which veers with the individual characteristics ; it has made them listless lookers-on, instead of earnest workers for a cause ; and it has, on the part of many, been the reason for the acceptance of *dogmatic opinions*, simply because they had grown weary of holding no opinions ; for the healthy mind will not remain satisfied with nothing to believe. It has caused a spurious liberalism, which opposes nothing because it believes nothing, which tolerates all opinions because it has none of its own to defend. The consequence has been, that our children have often lost the sense of loyalty, because there was nothing for them to be loyal to.

Now, we do stand for a definite way of viewing the problems of Christianity and religion. If we do not, we waste our time and our strength and our money to no purpose. We lose much to gain nothing. But if we do stand for a purpose, if we do have a duty to perform, we owe it to ourselves to see that our purpose and work should be presented clearly, and impressed upon the mind and heart. We have our conceptions of God, of the relations of God to man, of the nature of man, of the work of Jesus Christ, of the character of the Bible and its relations to Christianity; and we have very definite ideas as to the nature of Christianity, and the relation of the religious sentiment to knowledge; and we should take pains to get a clearly defined idea of all these things, and so be able to give a reason for our hope. We should instil these principles into the songs our children sing, and in the interpretation of the Scriptures we read to them. We should train those who are older in the right ways of regarding the Bible and the nature of its contents. We should see to it that they were not left so ignorant of its contents that any one is able to mislead them, or at least confuse them, by interpretations long ago discarded by the canons of all modern criticism. And it will be well if we ourselves and our children read books like Philochristus and Onesimus, which are based upon the impartial study of the earliest Christian history, that we and they may see how different that time was from the fancy pictures which have so often been drawn by those who justify their theological and ecclesiastical assumptions by an appeal to an imaginary history of the past. It would be well, too, if we would read those writers who have clearly stated and proved the position we occupy. Nothing vexes me more than to hear people say they do not know what liberal Christianity is, while writings like those of Channing and Parker and Martineau and Hedge lie covered with dust. Read them, and you will find something to believe, and something substantial to trust in. Perhaps, also, a faithful attendance at church might be a help towards understanding something of what liberal Christianity is, and is trying to do. But just here is the difficulty. Some of you come once a month, once a year, and wonder why the minister

does not do this or that. He often does so, and finds to his regret that on that day you saw a cloud in the sky and staid at home. I do not hesitate to say, that if we resolved, to the best of our ability, to regularly attend the services of this place; if we read and thought one half-hour every day; if we tried, young and old, to get at the heart of the gospel we profess to love, — that in a few years we would have the vision of divine things, which would kindle in our hearts a devotion and enthusiasm for it which would prove an irresistible power in the overthrow of the strongholds of superstition and error.

And now as to the value of the work we have to do: why, that will depend upon the purity of our motives and the knowledge of our task. And if it were not that sometimes we mean good without doing good, and that we know what is right without being willing to carry out what is right into conduct, what I have been saying would suffice. Our lack has been in the defect of organization, and, I may say, in the unwillingness of many to make small sacrifices. It is only by the organized effort of all, by the willingness of each one in his or her assigned place to give up something in order to fulfil it worthily, that we, as a people, shall bear witness to the truth of our mission by the enhanced value of our work.

More than in any other time people ask of churches to prove their mission by their works. What you do will often show to the community what you are. There never was a time when so many ways of doing useful and needed work as a church community offered themselves. Your ready acceptance of these will prove how you welcome your opportunities, and how gladly you accept your ministry of helpfulness.

My friends, we are living in a momentous time. It is a time full of disquiet, of unrest, of change, and of perplexity. The air is filled with the noise of one of the greatest of world conflicts. We are vaguely conscious that we are passing from one order of things to another. But what form the new world will take on is hidden from our sight. No one, however wise, can read the future in the hieroglyphs of the present. But what matters it? Enough for us if we are true to our providential mission; enough that we are true to the light that is

given. And what our success may be, whether great or small, concerns us not to know. It is for us to enter the opened door of our opportunity. Let it be said of us, at least when the history of our age shall be written, that — in a troublous and perplexed time, when religion was assailed by senseless bigotry on the one hand, and by unbelief on the other, and everywhere endangered by its close alliance with a traditional theology — we strove to make reason religious, and religion reasonable; to reveal the simple truth of the gospel story. Enough for us if it can be said that we tried to attain our purpose by pure living, by earnest thought, and unwearying toil.

1882.

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